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**MILITARY-TO-MILITARY CONFIDENCE BUILDING
MEASURES AND COOPERATION WITH THE
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA**

by

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Abstract

The United States and China are central players in international security for the 21st century. Unfortunately, their current security relationship is one of suspicion and misunderstanding. The Sino-American military-to-military relationship will either be a catalyst, or a stumbling block, for improving global security in the future. This paper focuses on military-to-military confidence building measures and cooperation initiatives to improve bilateral and ultimately international security. Without effective confidence building measures to improve communication, transparency, and verification, the U.S-China security relationship will remain volatile and unpredictable. A systematic military-to-military cooperative agreement comprised of exercises and contingency operations will also assist in dissipating current misperceptions. These actions will strengthen U.S.-China security relations, improve U.S. national security, and ultimately benefit the entire international security community.

I. Introduction

The United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) are key players within the international system. Their relationship has economic, social, and security implications, not only for themselves, but for the entire international community. Their future military-to-military relationship will either be a catalyst, or a stumbling block, for improving global security. Unfortunately, misperceptions, miscalculations, and suspicions, which could lead to an unintended confrontation, plague the United States Department of Defense (DoD) and the Chinese People's Liberation Army's (PLA) current relationship.¹

Background

Today's Sino-American relations stem from an oscillating historic pattern of cooperation and progress, on one hand, to confrontation and distrust, on the other.² In 1949, when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rose to power over mainland China, the United States initially rejected the new government and refused to officially recognize its existence. America also worked to minimize China's diplomatic and economic viability and interaction by attempting to exclude the PRC from the United Nations and placing embargoes on all its trade to the U.S.³ In the 1970s, in order to balance the Soviet Union's Cold War threat and advance U.S. national interests, the United States pragmatically began rapprochement activities with the People's Republic of China. The U.S. exploited a crack in Sino-Soviet relations that culminated in a 1969 border skirmish and a subsequent invasion of the Soviet Union into China.⁴ While U.S. rapprochement with the PRC served its strategic purpose of reducing Soviet influence and global expansion, it did little to bolster long term Sino-American security cooperation after the Cold War ended.

Despite the limited security progress during the rapprochement period of the 1970s, and the twenty years that followed, diplomatic and economic cooperation between the two countries improved, which sustained the U.S.-China relationship.⁵ Top-government visits, high-level summits, and new ambassador positions reinforced diplomatic relations between these two countries. These diplomatic activities began during the Nixon presidency and expanded over the three administrations. Additionally, in the 1970s the U.S. transferred China's diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing and supported a PRC seat on the United Nations Security Council.⁶ China, a poor nation during the Cold War, benefited in the late 1970s from internal economic reforms, reduced regulation and increased privatization as well as an expanding, less restrictive international market.⁷ With the expansion of multinational firms, international investments, and looser trade restrictions on goods and services, China's integration into the global economy continued to accelerate.⁸ Although diplomatic cooperation and economic integration between the PRC and the U.S. have yielded considerable returns (and continue to improve), the military-to-military relationship between the Department of Defense and the People's Liberation Army is lacking in cooperation and effectiveness.

A lack of long-term, methodical military relations between the DoD and PLA (besides a very limited number of occasional high-level exchange programs) have left the two governments and their respective military leaders skeptical and estranged. Some argue that aligning mutual U.S.-China interests is too difficult, takes too much time, and is improbable to achieve. Consequently, both countries have at times forfeited long-term objectives in order to accept quick, short-term military solutions. For example, during the Cold War, Sino-America military relations and policies were at times intentionally limited (by both sides) in order to avoid triggering a more aggressive Soviet Union foreign policy response to counter it.⁹ Yet, once the

Cold War ended and the original rationale for the strategic relationship disappeared, security relations did not improve. In fact, there have been a number of security incidents over the past 20 years that contribute to DoD and PLA misunderstandings. These security incidents include: the U.S. sending two Carrier Strike Groups to demonstrate support for the People's Republic of China (ROC) against PRC threats during the 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait crisis; the PRC's reaction to the U.S.'s 1999 inadvertent bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, Yugoslavia during the Kosovo Conflict; and the 2001 aircraft collision incident between the U.S. Air Force EP-3 Orion and the PLA Air Force Y-7 Coke.¹⁰ Due to the lack of systematic military cooperation and procedures, military tensions have left misunderstandings and misperceptions.

There is also a catalog of smaller, less visible, incidents that are symbolic of the instability in U.S.-China military relations. For example, during a summer 2007 battle fleet exercise in the Pacific, a PLA Navy Song Class submarine went undetected and intentionally surfaced in the middle of a Carrier Strike Group, disrupting the exercise.¹¹ During the holiday season later that same year, the PLA refused to allow the USS Kitty Hawk and its accompanying ships into Hong Kong for a planned and agreed Thanksgiving visit. The PLA never provided a reason for prohibiting the planned port-stop and a day later even reversed its decision; unfortunately, the Kitty Hawk and its accompanying ships had already departed the area and were back at sea (disappointing more than 300 family members of American sailors who had flown to Hong Kong to celebrate the holiday with the sailors on board).¹² In the spring of 2009, Chinese vessels shadowed, harassed, and maneuvered "dangerously close" to American unarmed ocean surveillance ships in international waters.¹³ Despite the volume of minor incidents similar to these, the primary reasons for the uncertainty in Sino-American military relations are the

PLA's absence of transparency and reciprocity and tensions over the island of Taiwan and the ROC.

Transparency and Reciprocity

Transparency and reciprocity are key issues in U.S.-China security relations.

Unfortunately, the PLA's lack of openness and its unbalanced actions have strained the U.S.-China relationship, since rapprochement began over 35 years ago. Chinese analysts Kenneth Allen and Eric McVadon point out that:

The PLA carefully orchestrates its bilateral exchanges to maximize benefits for itself and, through use of limited reciprocity and transparency, to minimize the amount of information the PLA provides to other countries.¹⁴

According to a 2002 Department of Defense *Annual Report on the Military Power of the People's Republic of China*, the PLA repeatedly restricts DoD military-observation visits to the same "showcase" units. Unfortunately, these units do not accurately represent the PLA's true operational force.¹⁵ It also limits the "showcase" units to non-advanced war fighting exercises. The U.S., on the other hand, takes PLA delegations to numerous facilities of varying sensitivities and specialties and to a variety of Army, Air Force, and Marine exercises.¹⁶ According to a 2004 RAND Corporation study, most analysts appear to agree that the PLA has not displayed mutual reciprocity in this regard. The study states that the PLA reasoning for these actions is their embarrassment regarding certain units' limited capability and the overall lack of military funding.¹⁷

Sino-American cultural and governmental differences in perceptions, organizations, and policies are also factors to consider. China's foreign policy objectives focus on "ensuring sovereignty and territorial integrity...and international respect and status."¹⁸ Despite China's rhetoric about its benign military intentions, it is difficult to accept these claims amidst rapid

military expansion and modernization. It is especially difficult to accept if prohibited from greater access and more accurate data regarding its military capabilities and operations. When calls for greater transparency and reciprocity occur, the PLA typically responds with signs of irritation. In fact, when former Vice President Dick Cheney asked China for greater transparency in military spending and build-up, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman accused the U.S. of “acting like a nosy neighbor.”¹⁹ This lack of transparency and reciprocal behavior toward the U.S. has strained Sino-American military relations. As China’s military capability expands, concerns that it will use the PLA to achieve its most important national security objective, control over Taiwan, increases.

Taiwan

Cross-Strait tensions regarding Taiwan are the primary reason behind unsettled Sino-American military relations. China views Taiwan as part of the PRC and wants to reclaim it. It sees Taiwan’s return “to the motherland” as an inevitable internal matter and an essential part of their control over the Greater China area.²⁰ The PRC also maintains that Taiwan is a critical component of their national security interest and a subject which they will not compromise. Since the mid-1990s, China has focused its military modernization on developing a force capable of returning Taiwan to the PRC.²¹ The PRC’s military growth and modernization over the past decade is unmatched. In fact, from 1998 to 2007, the Chinese defense budget grew at an annual rate of almost 16%, and in 2007 their defense budget increased by over 20%.²² The PLA is also developing new high-technological systems. They have produced new F-10 jet fighters which are on par with fourth-generation fighters. They are also developing anti-satellites, anti-aircraft, quiet subs, and new ballistic missiles.²³ The current PLA modernization appears focused on

countering U.S. military intervention during a potential Cross-Strait crisis as well as making China a credible regional and global military power.

Despite China's rapid military modernizations and expanding defense budgets, they maintain having no intentions of reclaiming Taiwan by force. However, the PRC's lack of transparency, ambiguous decision-making process, and Cross-Strait security overtones and posturing towards Taiwan concern the U.S. Section One of *China's National Defense in 2008* gives a view of the PRC's determination of defeating Taiwan:

The attempts of the separatist forces for 'Taiwan independence' to seek 'de jure Taiwan independence' have been thwarted...[but the PRC still] face disruption and sabotage by separatist and hostile force...[and these] Separatist forces...pose threats to China's unity and security.²⁴

The U.S. National Military Strategy (NMS) and the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) highlight the U.S.'s commitment to the defense of Taiwan.²⁵ The PRC's intentions toward Taiwan and its rapid military advancements triggered the U.S. Congress to monitor the situation more closely. In 2000, Congress mandated DoD to provide an annual report updating current Chinese military capabilities and potential security implications. Additionally, the most recent QDR states that, "China has the greatest potential to compete militarily with the United States and field disruptive military technologies that could over time set off traditional U.S. military advantages absent U.S. counter strategies."²⁶ This is one of the reasons why the DoD has increased military coordination and planning with the ROC. The PRC security concern has also led to an increase in official military exchanges and arms sales between the U.S. and the ROC. In fact, the Taiwan government is now one of the premier – in terms of arms quantity and quality – Foreign Military Sales customers of the United States.²⁷ China views these U.S. military relations with Taiwan as a "violation of the principles established in the three Sino-U.S. joint communiqués (which state that the U.S. acknowledges that there is only one China and that

Taiwan is a part of China), causing serious harm to Sino-U.S. relations as well as peace and stability across the Taiwan Straits.”²⁸

Options

China’s rapid military modernization; its commitment to reunify with Taiwan; and its lack of transparency and reciprocity, combined with America’s pledge to “do whatever it takes to defend Taiwan,” leave the United States Department of Defense and the Chinese People’s Liberation Army with an unsettled relationship of suspicion, misunderstanding, and misperception.²⁹ This unsettled relationship increases the potential of unintended Sino-American confrontations and presents problems not only for the U.S. and China, but for the entire international community. The United States and China’s military-to-military relationship is at a crossroads.

This paper outlines the available military confidence-building measures, military exercises, and military security cooperation that DoD should implement with the PLA to improve national security and preserve U.S. national interests while decreasing the likelihood of potential conflicts in the future.

II. Implementation

Military Confidence Building Measures

Confidence building measures (CBM) are a set of actions or procedures that reduce military tensions between two (or more) states. In practice, CBMs function to assist the calculability and predictability of a country’s conduct, so that states will have certain expectations regarding the behavior of other states.³⁰ Although there are many forms of effective confidence building, such as economic, diplomatic, or military, each method aims at reducing military tensions. The effectiveness of confidence building measures begins with the quality and

specificity of agreed parameters. Consequently, any CBM will entail at least some degree of political diplomacy. In fact, the most comprehensive CBM model in history is the East-West negotiations which culminated in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. At the height of the Cold War, this CBM solidified the status quo in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and engendered military-to-military cooperation between the East and the West. This military CBM initiated mutual observation of military readiness activities on both sides.³¹

During the Helsinki Conference, the Swiss Prime Minister, Olof Palme, argued:

The Military balance, which is generally considered a guarantee of peace, could be maintained at a lower level if states knew more about one another's preparations and intentions. Confidence would deepen. Over-reaction and arguments based on 'worst case' assumptions could be avoided.³²

Military-to-military confidence building measures may be the best way to achieve the primary objective of CBMs – to curb military tensions by eliminating causes of fear and mistrust.³³ Even though a comprehensive agreement with multiple layers (strategic, operational, and tactical) is the ultimate CBM goal, in reality most CBMs look to simply reduce secrecy and increase trust. These CBMs usually function as a prelude to more formal and comprehensive agreements in the future.³⁴ For example, an open and informal military budget information exchange with the PLA could lead to a more formal military armament or force verification agreement in the future.

Confidence building measures are not designed to compromise national security interests. CBMs with the PLA would not assist them in improving their war fighting capability against the ROC or the U.S. Motivations for negotiating CBMs do not necessarily need to be the same for the U.S. and China. As long as both sides share a common desire to avoid an inadvertent Sino-American conflict, or unnecessary escalation, confidence building measures are appropriate actions to explore.³⁵ However, in order to produce meaningful progress, both sides must commit

to following the negotiated measures. In other words, it is critical that leaders ensure their side demonstrates the will and determination to follow through.

In practice, confidence building measures usually address short-term military misperceptions and inaccuracies, yet they provide long-term effects. Even though a single CBM typically will not prevent a conflict, it can contribute to peace by beginning a series of long term agreements.³⁶ Over time, CBMs have the potential of stabilizing relationships and cooperation by identifying common security concerns. For example, China shares a common security concern with the U.S. regarding the Global War on Terror (GWOT). China actually voted in favor of authorizing the international use of force, for the first time ever, against terrorist organizations, in United Nations Resolution 1368 following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the U.S.³⁷ In fact, during the early stages of the GWOT, Americans and Chinese began counterterrorism dialogues and shared intelligence information.³⁸ This coordination soon stopped, however, because of a lack of confidence building measures. In 2007, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates stated that it is important to enter into a longer-term dialogue of confidence building measures because they create an ongoing process rather than a one-time coordinated event.³⁹

There are four general confidence building measure categories to consider when negotiating and cooperating with another state. These broad, overarching, CBM approaches are communication, transparency, verification, and constraint.⁴⁰ The CBM approaches most likely to succeed between DoD and the PLA are centered on communication, transparency, and verification. A separate Sino-American constraint CBM is unnecessary since this type of approach typically centers around a national-political border where troop separation is critical. In fact, constraint CBMs are designed to ensure specific types and levels of military forces are

kept at a set distance from one another in or near a designated zone or territory. The measures frequently implemented in a constraint CBM are procedures such as pre-notification of troop movement above agreed levels or restrictions of certain forces and equipment in certain areas.⁴¹ DoD should incorporate the intent of constraint CBM procedures into effective U.S.-China communication, transparency, and verification CBMs.

Communication

Communication confidence building measures are required to improve transparency and verification capability. They also helps to defuse tensions during moments of crisis. Through an agreed procedure, communications CBMs clarify misperceived and unintended actions expeditiously and conveniently. Establishing these procedures will also improve discussion and consultation during benign times. During a strategic dialogue conference between the U.S. and China, at the end of 2007, the Secretary of Defense and the President of China announced the official establishment of a communication CBM – a direct telephone line between DoD and the PLA.⁴² This is the first official communication CBM of the Sino-American relationship. It is also the only “official” CBM currently existing between both militaries.

Effective communication requires more than a “hot line” between senior defense leaders. It also requires coordination at middle to lower levels. For example, the U.S. Pacific Command could establish a regional communication center for mid-level DoD commanders to communicate with mid-level PLA commanders. This center would connect operational and tactical commanders. It would connect leaders from both sides during inadvertent operational encounters in order to mitigate misunderstanding and resolve crises before they become strategic concerns.

Expanding DoD and PLA functional and educational military exchanges is critical in improving current communication issues. Instead of focusing primarily on high-level delegations, confidence building measures should focus on lower-level exchanges. This will dramatically improve communication. According to former Assistant Secretary of Defense Joseph Nye, the “former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Colin Powell, stated that if you get two generals together for a visit, you gain a few years of dividends, but if you get two majors together you reap the benefits for a few decades.”⁴³ DoD should also continue to engage the PLA on different topics of concern or common interest. This is exactly what happened in the November 2007 Strategic Dialogue. When asked, the Chinese agreed to open their historical archives to help locate U.S. servicemen listed as prisoners of war or missing in action during the Korean conflict.⁴⁴

Transparency and Verification

Military transparency and verification confidence building measures increase openness between militaries in addition to confirming compliance with established agreements. Transparency CBMs include such things as pre-notifications of training exercises or other large military activities; data or intelligence exchanges; and invitations to observe another state’s military operating procedures or exercises.⁴⁵ Although these measures may not immediately improve transparency, they open military coordination and dialogues. Verification CBMs certify compliance with established agreements and encourage reciprocity. On-site military inspections, data exchange evaluations, and other compliance monitoring procedures foster greater openness of military capabilities and behavior.⁴⁶

Establishing transparent and verifiable CBMs will, at a minimum, place the U.S.-China military relationship on the road to improving trust and mutual understanding. Prior to

negotiating specific military confidence building measures, it is important to consider Chinese and American cultural and legal difficulties regarding bilateral coordination. The ambiguity and secrecy of the PRC's political and cultural nature significantly affect DoD-PLA coordination. Of course, neither military wants to divulge important sensitive information, but the PRC has a broader definition of "state secrets" than the U.S. For example, the PRC categorized their HIV/AIDS epidemic from 1990-2001 as a "state secret." Additionally, they classified death-toll numbers from earthquakes, floods, and other natural disasters as "state secrets" until 2005.⁴⁷ The PLA is currently very reserved in the information it is willing to share.

Although DoD recognizes the benefits of systematic confidence building measures in advancing cooperation and improving transparency, there is U.S. law to consider. A U.S. National Defense Authorization Act from Fiscal Year 2000 sets restrictions on military exchanges between DoD and the PLA. It prohibits specific exchanges that "would create a national security risk due to an inappropriate exposure" of U.S capabilities and operations.⁴⁸ Although appropriate military exchanges continue to occur, they are sporadic and limited. During a 2006 visit to China, the U.S. Pacific Commander (USPACOM), Admiral William J. Fallon, stated that he would like to see Congress take steps toward reducing some of the current DoD exchange restrictions.⁴⁹ And in a 2007 strategic dialogue conference, focused on improving Sino-American military relations, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates also expressed the desire "of finding some confidence building measures along the way" as cooperation continues in the future.⁵⁰ Cultural and legal intricacies on both sides highlight the necessity and benefits of clear, stable, systematic CBMs.

When considering confidence building measures with the Chinese, it is important to keep a long-term perspective. The U.S. must lead and encourage bilateral cooperation, even if the

PRC is initially slow to follow. Over time, systematic CBM approaches will break down tensions and reduce ambiguity. Since the majority of U.S. security capabilities, which would be exposed during CBMs, are already available in open sources, DoD has little to lose from potential imbalances in information reciprocity.⁵¹ In the end, it is in the best interest of U.S. national security to take the lead in Sino-American military confidence building measures. In the long run, cooperating with the PLA will assist China in becoming a responsible global stakeholder, as USPACOM commander, Admiral Timothy Keating, and his Deputy Director of the Commander's Action Group, Lieutenant Colonel Terrance McCaffrey, described:

China's rise will be important...While we must maintain our military capabilities to preserve regional [and global] security, interaction with China must also focus on what we can do to influence China's development as a responsible global stakeholder...We improve understanding and reduce the potential for miscalculation during contingencies or emergencies. Our future efforts will emphasize opportunities for cooperation with China rather than areas of competition.⁵²

There are DoD-PLA confidence building measures to pursue now. The first is an agreement to notify the other country's military of any large military activities and training exercises. Since there are similarities between U.S. and China's space capabilities, the DoD and PLA should also establish an annual space and satellite data exchange conference. This confidence building measure would improve understanding of ramifications of unilateral actions in the highly volatile space regime. DoD should also encourage systematic military exchanges at all levels, but target exchanges between lower-level officers with similar functional expertise. These exchanges are critical in improving the PLA's integration into the international security structure in addition to improving its current track record of secrecy and limited cooperation. Although a wide variety of on-site visits and realistic war-fighting exercise observations are important confidence building measures to consider, it is more important for DoD and the PLA to cooperate and train in military-to-military exercises and real-world operations, especially

where shared national security interests are involved, such as humanitarian assistance, maritime security missions, and search-rescue operations.

Military-to-Military Exercises

Military-to-military exercises are essential means of improving long term military understanding and cooperation. Not only do military exercises advance personal and organizational relationships, they also provide a window into the nature of another state's military force. They reveal a nation's military theory, military equipment, military decision-making process, as well as exposing security strengths and weaknesses – this is why some are against military exercises. However, DoD engages in exercises to influence and shape (Phase 0 of the Phasing Model) the country or region involved, in support of U.S. national security strategy objectives.⁵³ The objectives and focus of military exercises also reveal regional and international security priorities and concerns of exercise participants. Military-to-military exercises with China will specifically encourage the PLA to be more reliable in the international security community and assist the PRC in accepting regional and global responsibility. The contacts and relationships established during military-to-military exercises have the potential to reduce uncertainty, tensions, and estrangement in the future.

Over the past decade China has implemented significant changes to its national security strategy. *China's National Defense 2008* highlights how these changes are transforming the PLA. In fact, some of the PLA's recent policies and missions reveal the PRC's willingness to accept its role as a critical stakeholder in the international security community. *China's National Defense 2008* states:

China is unswervingly taking the road of peaceful development, unswervingly carrying out its policies of reform and opening-up and socialist modernization, unswervingly pursuing an independent foreign policy of peace and a national defense policy solely

aimed at protecting its territory and people, and endeavoring to build, together with other countries, a harmonious world of enduring peace and common prosperity.⁵⁴

To better advance these PRC international security objectives, the PLA has implemented a strategy of “active defense.”⁵⁵ This strategy enables the PLA to focus on international security engagement and cooperation while amplifying national defense. It encourages security engagement over security isolation. China’s renowned leader, Deng Xiaoping, emphasized that “... [an] active defensive is not merely defense per se, but includes defensive offensives,” requiring a strategy of expanding military reach.⁵⁶ The PLA has demonstrated a commitment to expanding its military reach through regional and global exercise engagements since October 2002 (its first combined military exercise in decades). Since this small, bilateral, anti-terrorism military exercise with Kyrgyzstan, the PLA has participated in 28 combined exercises with 18 different partners. The U.S military has only participated in three of these combined exercises, all of which were maritime exercises. The first U.S.-China exercise was a bilateral search and rescue exercise in the fall of 2006; the next was a multilateral counter-terrorism exercise in spring 2007; and the final exercise was a multilateral, multi-purpose maritime exercise in summer 2007.⁵⁷

Unfortunately, frustration surrounded all 3 of the exercises. The problems stemmed from the different ways that the U.S. and PRC approach exercises. American military forces view exercises as a learning opportunity and a way of gaining experience at the operational and tactical levels. Hence, the U.S. approached past exercises focusing on practical lessons, functional planning, and building personal relationships. The PLA, however, approached the exercises very differently. Their primary exercise goal was strategic posturing. The Chinese wanted to send a strategic message of their military’s health and positive nature.⁵⁸ Despite these differences, systematic, small-scale exercises can still profit both sides. Admiral Keating said

that manageable exercises will “be a further step in the effort to build trust between the American and Chinese militaries...I would hope, over time, to engage in exercises that would be indicative of a transparency...that doesn't exist today.”⁵⁹

Since military-to-military exercises are an important element in improving DoD and PLA relations, initiating regular bilateral or multilateral small-scale humanitarian assistance, search-rescue, and maritime piracy cooperation exercises is an ideal starting point. Over time, relationships built during these modest exercises will help resolve differences and mitigate areas of military misperception. These types of exercises are ideal because they represent important capabilities for both militaries, yet the potential risk of compromising national military secrets is minimal. Without the risk of compromising military security, the PLA and DoD will be more open and willing to share capabilities and information. The openness from benign humanitarian, search-rescue, and maritime security exercises will benefit the DoD in gaining a basic understanding of China’s military leadership role and decision-making process. Even if the U.S. military does not gain every desired tactical or operational objective from executing these combined exercises, working with PRC functional equivalent is valuable.⁶⁰ Moreover, these types of missions represent the most likely near-term crises in which the U.S. military and the PLA will cooperate.

Security Cooperation

In addition to military-to-military exercises, DoD and the PLA should cooperate in specific real-world security operations. The U.S. and China share vital security interests – maritime and natural-energy resource security as well as humanitarian and peacekeeping relief operations. Security cooperation could benefit both countries without compromising any internal national security. In fact, bilateral or multilateral cooperation in real-world operations ultimately

improves U.S. national security, decreases financial requirements, and provides an opportunity to reduce regional misperceptions and global misunderstandings. A cooperative security approach would not only benefit DoD and PLA bilateral relations, it would increase resource availability and enhance legitimacy perceptions in addition to acting as a catalyst for improving regional and global security in the future.

U.S.-China security cooperation should start with maritime security operations, since both navies have previously exercised together. They are also the military branch most likely to come in mutual contact, and they play a significant role in each country's defense policy. It is also a good place to start, since 80% of the world's goods move via the sea.⁶¹ Protecting the primary sea lines of communication (SLOCs) for international commercial shipping is a security interest for both countries. It is especially important in Southeast Asia, since more than 25% of the world's cargo and 50% of the world's oil pass through the Strait of Malacca.⁶² Implementing naval security cooperation to secure SLOCs, combat global terrorism, and fight against sea piracy will provide meaningful coordinated experiences to reduce DoD-PLA suspicions. In fact, in 2007, as Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Michael Mullen invited Chinese PLA Navy Admiral Wu Shengli to participate in the Global Maritime Partnership Initiative – a maritime alliance comprised of foreign navies designed to address global maritime threats.⁶³ This was a significant step toward improving relations with the PLA as well as an opportunity to build better international maritime security cooperation.

Humanitarian assistance and peace keeping operations are also ideal and important areas for improving U.S.-China security coordination. First, the PRC already focuses on these types of missions and increasingly supports humanitarian and peacekeeping causes around the world. In fact, the PLA has increased international humanitarian assistance missions over the past few

years, such as the December 2006 Fiji coup d'état as well as recent peacekeeping contingencies in Africa.⁶⁴ Second, today's global requirement for humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping operations surpasses America's resources. In Africa, for example, the U.S. has a very well established peacekeeping training program, but due to insufficient fiscal and personnel resources it cannot attain all its goals. Meanwhile, the PLA is looking to expand its peacekeeping role in Africa and needs peacekeeping training.⁶⁵ By training PLA humanitarian peacekeeping forces, the number of peacekeepers will grow while the U.S. and China learn more about each other and the way each operates. A cooperative effort will not only strengthen security relations between them, it will also combine monetary, manpower, and organizational strengths to improve humanitarian and peacekeeping effectiveness.⁶⁶

III. Conclusion

China's rapid military modernization; its commitment to reunifying Taiwan; and its lack of transparency and reciprocity represent unique strategic security challenges for the United States. Whether the PRC is perceived as a threat or potential partner, the unsettled relationship of suspicion, misunderstanding, and misperception remains, increasing the potential of an unintended confrontation. Without effective confidence building measures to improve communication, transparency, and verification, the U.S-China security relationship will remain volatile and unpredictable. A systematic military-to-military cooperative agreement is essential to dissipate distrust and reduce suspicion. Thus, it is in the United States' national security interests to engage with the People's Republic of China in military-to-military confidence building measures, military exercises, and security cooperation. These military policy actions will eventually improve U.S. national security, enable both countries to achieve higher levels of peace than they could unilaterally, and ultimately benefit the entire global security community.

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